



WIKTOR GRZYWO-DĄBROWSKI

The fourth day of the trial

Professor Wiktor Grzywo-Dąbrowski, 61 years old, professor at the University of Warsaw, head of the Department of Forensic Medicine, no relationship to the parties.

Presiding judge: – You have been appointed court expert regarding the methods of killing people in Poland by the occupation authorities. I would like to ask you for a detailed report and a statement on the topic.

Expert: – Your Honors, I will base my statement partly on the documents I had at my disposal as the head of the Forensic Medicine Department throughout the German occupation. The facility operated through all that period and I had a chance to see only a very small percentage of incidents, because not all corpses of people who were murdered were delivered to our facility; nevertheless, a lot of them were.

In 1942, 1943, and at the end of 1944, the number of corpses delivered to us was particularly high. Unfortunately, all the documents were burned because the facility was burned down by the Germans after the uprising; however, I still have a general idea about the situation and I can share it with the Supreme Tribunal in detail.

During that period, corpses of people killed on the streets of Warsaw were brought to the Forensic Medicine Department almost every day. In the vast majority of cases, they had been killed by patrols in street shootings, so in that period we usually dealt with gunshot wounds of various types. Another type of corpse, which was delivered to us very rarely, was bodies of people who had been interrogated by the Germans at Szucha Avenue.

I remember the second type very well because I knew one of those people, Dr. Białokur, and his wife, who were murdered at Szucha Avenue. There were no gunshot wounds, but I found



bloody bruises, so he was beaten to death with some kind of a blunt tool. There was no autopsy and all the notes went missing.

When it comes to prominent figures, I remember the body of General Bałachowicz, who was shot on the street.

That is a very short description of what I observed during the occupation period.

Another type of research concerned the exhumations that were carried out. I had the opportunity to participate in exhumations in Palmiry, in the Kabaty Woods, in the Piaseczno District, and near Piaseczno. I personally examined the majority of the bodies, or my assistants did so under my supervision. I received all the documents and, on based on these, I can say that I had a chance to examine 177 corpses. Those were exhumations of bodies from earlier incidents: Palmiry in 1939-1940 and then in 1942-1943.

It was difficult to determine the causes of death. The graves were of different sizes, in some of them there were a hundred people, in others – several or a dozen or so, while yet others were single bodies. The corpses were not arranged in any way; they just lay one on top of another. It seemed that the executions had been performed in the following way: the people were placed on the edge of a 2-meter-wide pit, and were thrown inside while still alive. Additionally, people who, like forest rangers, secretly watched parts of the executions in the forest, showed me bullet holes in many places on the trees, and told me that some people would break free, run away, and be killed while escaping.

Very extensive post-mortem changes were identified: the corpses were putrefied, dried out, and mummified. The vast majority of deaths were caused by a shot fired from the front. This applied to 114 out of 177 cases. About 50 people were shot from the back. It was hard to tell because the skulls had burst into pieces and we did not manage to collect all the fragments. As we determined, the majority of the people had been shot from the back, a dozen or so had been shot from the front, another dozen or so had been shot from the front and in the chest, others only in the chest, partly from the back. Only in twelve cases did we identify damage to the spine, skull, or jaws, meaning the bodies had been hit with a heavy object, a rifle butt, or something else, because the bones were crushed and damaged. In two cases, we determined that hand grenades had been used. However, it was not always possible to determine the exact nature of the damage.

Were only corpses buried or also people who were alive and wounded? Generally, it must be stated that given the very extensive damage and the type of the weapons used, mainly long military firearms, the shots were almost always fatal, and it was a quick death. In the vast majority of cases, we have to assume that those were corpses that were buried. In a dozen or so cases, superficial gunshot wounds in the head and legs were identified. In a few cases, it can be assumed that people were thrown into the pit alive. They might have been covered with soil and died of suffocation in the common grave.

Apart from this, in six cases we found that female corpses had blindfolds over their face. It seemed that their eyes had been covered before the execution.

I can describe one more example – I examined a man who, at the beginning of August 1944, was ordered by the Germans to carry corpses and place them on a pile. At one point, he was shot in the neck. He was already on the pile, which was burning, but he managed to crawl out from under the corpses. While examining him, I found numerous burns and gunshot wounds. I also remember the case of a woman who survived in the conditions I have just described.

That is all I can say.

Judge Rybczyński: – Did you participate in the examination of the rooms in the military prison at Gęsia Street?

Expert: – I saw those rooms. I was not able to determine anything because various modifications had been made in the meantime. I saw places where there were ashes, and I found a lot of human bones. Additionally, in a cellar, I saw a furnace with remnants of human bones inside. I cannot tell what was the cause of the death of those people and how many of them there were, because I had no data to determine this.

Judge Rybczyński: – How many pits were there in that military prison?

Expert: – There were almost no pits. I was shown a few places in the yard where there were ashes and where I found the remains of human bones. Small holes were dug, about half a meter deep, and there were ashes inside, but I did not examine them, and it is impossible to tell, based solely on ashes, whether they come from burned corpses.

Judge Rybczyński: – Were you in the cellar at Szucha Avenue?



Expert: – I walked around those cellars. I saw a thick layer of ashes and I found the remains of human bones, but I don't know any further details of the case.

Prosecutor Siewierski: – I would like to ask you if there was any characteristic grave that would suggest that people had been killed there at the edge of the grave?

Expert: – Based on the arrangement of common graves, it happened very often that those people were lined up at the edge and the corpses fell down. In one case, I saw a corpse positioned head down in the grave: I saw feet with shoes on, and the head was situated obliquely between other corpses in the pit. That position indicated that the body had fallen onto other corpses and was buried.

Prosecutor Siewierski: – When did that characteristic incident you have talked about happen? The one when a person was shot and placed on a burning pile by accident?

Expert: – On 9 August 1944.

Presiding judge: – Thank you, professor. You are excused.